

In the first days of the war, worried she was going to get fired for watching hour after hour of combat footage not altogether strictly relevant to her job as a freight insurance analyst, she had texted Mañuel, who sat across from her, asking if her music was loud enough to hear. He said no, and she had taken a note of the volume level and the cadence of the automatic rifle fire, its distance from the camera. She turned on her noisy desk fan, just to be safe. As her spreadsheets remained ignored, death spread across her computer screen line by rastered line. In one video, a Russian armored personnel carrier got stuck in a ditch. A Ukrainian strolled up and threw a grenade in the hatch. Smoke puffed breezily from the viewing slits. She didn't smile, but she came awfully close to feeling good.

Her mom texted her and asked her to pick up a jar of the white asparagus from MaMa Jean's on the way home. The store was spotless, epoxy concrete, uncut kale, BPA-free; she'd been spending so much time virtually inhabiting Eastern Europe that she'd forgotten America, the antiseptic gloss of its middle-class temptations. But then, was *spending* the right word? Could she claim experience of the place, or even knowledge? She saw Ukraine through the 15-inch diagonal of her laptop screen, but she knew the difference in the light, the ruts and draws of the terrain, the ruddy chaos of its markets that she navigated, on Google Maps or Yandex or WhatsApp, flipping through the angles, matching the aftermath to the world before the war. She could geolocate a Ukrainian city better now than Springfield, three blocks from home. In America all the clues were wrong; she could not fix herself in place or time.

Pulling out from the MaMa Jean's Natural Market lot, she imagined the slashing dart of a missile going over her head, a flash from behind her, and all that kale blasting up through the roof like a geyser.

Her mom had forgotten to lock the stairwell's lower door again, so she reprimanded her.

"I don't see what the big deal is," her mom said. "The top one locks just fine."